

Decision No. 92517 DEC 16 1980

ORIGINAL

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Application of Ridge-Wheel Properties, Inc. to use overhead electric distribution extensions to serve a residential development.

Application No. 59801 (Filed July 9, 1980)

O P I N I O N

Ridge-Wheel Properties, Inc. (applicant) seeks Commission approval of a tariff rule variance to allow an overhead extension of electric and telephone service in a subdivision comprising 6,100 acres located 13 miles north of Ukiah and 4 miles south of Willits within the service territory of Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E). Applicant does not meet the criteria of PG&E's Tariff Rule No. 15, Section C. It predicates its request upon Section D of the aforesaid rule, which states:

"Exceptional Cases. In unusual circumstances, when the application of these rules appears impractical or unjust to either party, or in the case of the extension of lines of a higher voltage, the utility or the applicant shall refer the matter to the Public Utilities Commission for special ruling or for the approval of special conditions which may be mutually agreed upon, prior to commencing construction."

The unusual circumstances relied upon in this application is that the costs of underground lines, caused by the mountainous terrain, make it economically unfeasible to go underground. Initial cost estimates show undergrounding priced at \$563,651 as compared to equivalent overhead construction priced at \$86,000. The ratio of underground to overhead costs within the subdivision is 12.5 to 1.

Attached to the application is a letter dated April 1, 1975 from the Planning Department of the County of Mendocino to the Commission stating that the subdivision units which are before us had been approved by the county of Mendocino prior to its establishing an undergrounding ordinance. An undergrounding ordinance was enacted after the projects were approved.

A field investigation by the Commission staff was conducted in October 1980 and a report filed on November 24, 1980. A discussion of the report follows.

Except for three miles of overhead electric distribution facilities, there are no other existing or proposed utility systems within the subdivision. Propane gas from rechargeable containers is being used. No water system is planned; it is anticipated that electricity will be required to operate the individual water well pumps for domestic purposes. No sewage treatment facilities are planned; individual homeowners must install their own disposal facilities.

Steep slopes were observed on a number of lots. However, the staff's opinion is that access to these lots is not so difficult as to preclude underground construction, although the cost of trenching will be substantially influenced by the rugged terrain. The soil and subsurface in the development appears to be mostly limestone shale and is sufficiently workable to allow excavation of trenches.

Anticipating approval of its request for deviation, applicant constructed approximately three miles of primary distribution line in the area, which it proposes to deed to PG&E. The line so erected is generally acceptable to PG&E under General Order No. 95. However, the poles are too short to allow joint use by communication utilities unless the entire electrical system is rebuilt with taller poles.

Some lots are so deep as to require service drops of more than 600 feet and require underground installation of primary voltage distribution to residences. Mobile homes are placed on several lots; meter poles would be required if overhead installation of electric service were approved. These and power poles do not blend with the foliage and landscape, but rather obtrusively manifest their appearance. In wooded areas, maintenance of overhead lines is more difficult, and the overhead lines represent an increased fire hazard as well as reduced reliability of service.

The staff report concludes that there are no unusual circumstances that would justify granting the application for deviation from mandatory underground line extension requirements.

We concur with the staff recommendation that the application should be denied. We have, as the staff states in its report, denied such applications where the cost ratio of overheading to undergrounding has varied from 1.26 to 27.71. More compelling reasons than cost alone must be shown if deviations are to be granted.

Findings of Fact

1. The area to be served is relatively remote, forested, and scenic.
2. No significant overhead lines exist in the area of the development where deviation is sought.
3. Applicant does not meet the criteria for exemption from Tariff Rule No. 15.
4. It is not impractical to construct an underground line extension to applicant's area.
5. The cost of undergrounding line extensions and service connections in this area is not prohibitive.

6. No special circumstances have been shown to exist.
7. A public hearing is not required.

Conclusion of Law

The application for deviation should be denied.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The application is denied.
2. Pacific Gas and Electric Company is not authorized to deviate from the mandatory underground requirements of Rule No. 15 of its tariffs to accept overhead line extensions to applicant's properties.

The effective date of this order shall be thirty days after the date hereof.

Dated DEC 16 1980, at San Francisco, California.

John E. Byrne  
President

Robert D. Gualth

Clair T. Dredel

Commissioners

Commissioner Vernon L. Sturgeon, being necessarily absent, did not participate in the disposition of this proceeding.

Commissioner Leonard M. Gomes, Jr., being necessarily absent, did not participate.